



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Revised draft of the Belfast City Council framework to tackle poverty and reduce inequalities
Date:	22 November 2011
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	A proposal for a corporate poverty and inequalities framework was first presented to the Development Committee in November 2009. Following a series of further committee meetings, workshops, individual party briefings, and an all-party briefing on 11 October 2011, the latest draft was presented to Committee on 8 November 2011.
1.2	At the most recent Development Committee meeting Members requested that a decision on adopting the framework be deferred for a further two weeks to allow an opportunity for individual Members to seek clarifications and if required to propose amendments to the draft. It was agreed that this would be particularly useful for newer Members of the committee who might not have had the opportunity to become fully informed on all aspects of the draft.
1.3	Members should note that the proposals for the framework have become closely linked to the proposed Stimulus Investment Package. Both initiatives are based on the understanding that the council has a useful contribution to make in alleviating some of the effects of the economic downturn on our citizens and on local businesses. The framework also recognises the need to address the existence of inequalities and pockets of extreme deprivation within the city in order to emerge successfully from recession and enhance international economic competitiveness.
1.4	It is, of course, not solely within the council's gift to end poverty in Belfast (nor to solely end the economic downturn). But with some additional co-ordination; a greater focus on the barriers faced by those in poverty who wish to use our services; and by offering a strong supporting and advocacy role with our partners; it is possible to make our services more accessible, better targeted and ultimately more effective for those most in need.
1.5	The draft being presented with this paper contains a series of revisions and additions based on the input from Members over the past ten days.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Listed below is an overview of the main issues raised by Members over the past two weeks concerning the previous draft of the framework. Working to a short turnaround time officers have revised the draft to reflect these issues:
2.2	<p>(1) 'The council can only play a supporting role in addressing the causes of poverty'</p> <p>The revised framework now puts greater emphasis on the fact that the elimination of poverty requires sustained intervention by government at both regional and national levels. However, the framework presents the case that the council also has important contributions to make by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring that our services are more accessible to those in poverty; - Looking for opportunities to make more effective and targeted use of our existing resources; - Working with our partners (both statutory and community based) to enhance their own service delivery to those in poverty; - Raising awareness of the plight of an increasing proportion of Belfast's population who are at risk of falling into poverty; - playing an advocacy role with Government for those most at risk as an integral part of the council's emerging external relationships strategy; - Holding other statutory bodies to account.
2.3	These contributions are by no means insubstantial. Given the large number of services that we deliver at a local level, there are clear opportunities for the council to have a direct and positive impact at modest cost to the rate-payer.
2.4	<p>(2) 'The role of partners in tackling poverty'</p> <p>Members noted the primary role of Northern Ireland Government Departments in addressing the causes of poverty in Belfast. It is obvious that there are a wide range of necessary interventions to be made at this level such as early years programmes; economic development initiatives, tackling worklessness; health interventions; education and skills; targeted investment in deprived and interface areas and tailored support for families and older people. The Executive has made commitments to many of these strands of work in its Lifetimes Opportunities strategy.</p>
2.5	The Belfast City Council framework does not seek to supplant this government strategy. As noted above, we only have a specific range of limited interventions at our disposal. The framework proposes that the emphasis should be on partnership working and enhancing our advocacy role with Government on behalf of those Belfast citizens who are most at risk.
2.6	<p>(3) 'The framework should focus on actions that will have the highest impact'</p> <p>There was broad agreement that the framework should emphasise those actions that link to existing council work and which will have the most direct impact on those in poverty. The action plan focuses on such activities as employability and skills initiatives; improving access to our services; advice provision; projects around food and fuel poverty and an active engagement to create the correct conditions for the eventual removal of peace walls.</p>

	<p>(4) 'How much will the framework cost?'</p>
2.7	<p>Earlier drafts of the framework did include specific budgets against individual pieces of work where these were available. These estimates were removed in later drafts as, over the intervening months, many ceased to be up to date.</p>
2.8	<p>Revised budgets (and staff time commitments) have now been included in the draft where available. It should be noted that, given the nature of the framework (in that it is encouraging the adaptation of existing strands of work) it is difficult to include budgets against all items.</p>
2.9	<p>In total over five years, the budget for delivery of this framework across the whole council is around £1.7 million (which includes existing initiatives), but in addition, the council receives around £5.3 million through grants and external funding. However, the cost of delivering only new initiatives would be around £150,000 (excluding few initiatives without indicated budget). The income is predicted to be around £44,350 which brings the current cost for the council to be around £105,000. It is worth mentioning that there is a potential to attract up to €500,000 through EU funds to deliver a specific project within this framework.</p>
2.10	<p>Members also requests estimates for staff time against each action. These have also been added to the revised draft where available.</p>
	<p>(5) 'Measuring our impact'</p>
2.11	<p>The council places great emphasis on effective performance management to allow us to better measure the impact of our work. The revised draft proposes an approach that, while not overly burdensome, will allow Members to track the impact of the framework against a basket of indicators.</p>
2.12	<p>The framework will be reviewed after its first year to determine its effectiveness. As part of this process, a more robust performance framework would be established based on an outcomes model. Key external agencies (statutory and civic) will be engaged with as part of this review. This would make a much more robust link between the outcomes we want to achieve regarding poverty, the indicators we would use to measure them, and the actions we aim to deliver. This approach would not be possible in the first year of the framework as the majority of the proposed work is based on pre-existing initiatives.</p>
	<p>(6) 'Specific changes within the action plan'</p>
	<p>Based on the feedback from the Committee meeting on the 8th November and individual input by different councillors, we have slightly revised the action plan by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removing development of a website (too time consuming with limited added value) - Adding an action on 'exploring alternative finance arrangements' (it would address specific needs in the city) - Adding actions on more active lobbying and developing partnerships (it would strengthen our role) - Adding majority of employability programmes the council supports (to be comprehensive) - Adding columns with budget and income (as requested by majority of Members) - Merging 'supporting skills programmes through our community centres' with 'raising skills' action

